

THE
KLONDIKE
GOLD RUSH

by

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London, Ontario

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"Gold!"

The word was on everyone's lips back in 1898. All over the world, people were talking about Canadian gold.

Rich new gold fields had just been discovered. They were the richest anyone had ever seen.

The new gold fields were in the Yukon River valley, in the northwestern part of Canada. Until 1898, it was a quiet, almost empty place.

A few Chilkoot Indians called it home. They knew there was gold in the Yukon. They did not say much about it. They knew what would happen to their quiet land if people found out about the gold.

A few prospectors wandered up and down the valley. They were looking for gold. They froze in winter and baked in summer, but they kept on looking. Most of these prospectors found just enough gold to keep themselves in food and clothing.

But then a couple of prospectors struck it rich. Along the Yukon River, they found more gold than they had ever dreamed of!

It did not take long for the other prospectors to hear about the find. They came as fast as they could to stake their claims in the new gold field.

Each person could take one piece of land, called a claim, in the new gold field. They measured out a claim, five hundred feet long, along the river. They drove wooden stakes into the ground at each end of the claim. This made it clear to everyone that the land was taken.

Then more gold was discovered on the Klondike River, near where it flows into the Yukon River. This gold field was even richer than the other one.

Before long, the prospectors had rushed to the Klondike River. They made new claims along the Klondike. There were so many prospectors that a new town, Dawson City, was formed.

The gold the prospectors found was

"placer" or "free" gold. This kind of gold was not hidden in rock deep down inside the earth. It was in the form of gold dust or heavy nuggets, mixed in with the earth or with small stones.

You did not have to dig deep for placer gold. You could hit "pay dirt" at ten or twenty feet. Some of the gold was even lying on the ground or on the river bed. You could see the nuggets shining in the sunlight.

The gold was there for the taking, if you knew where to look.

To separate the gold dust and nuggets from the stones and earth, you had to run water over it. Gold is very heavy. It sinks to the bottom while the water washes the dirt and stones away.

The prospectors built long boxes of wood to put the dirt and stones in. They put these boxes by the river so that the water could run into them. They piled dirt into the boxes, and let the water wash over it.

Every two or three days they would



PANNING
for GOLD

get the heavy gold dust and nuggets from the bottom of the box. There was still a bit of dirt with the gold, so they would "pan" it. They put the dirty gold into a pan, and washed it by hand with water. This got out every bit of dirt.

It sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, it was easy for some. But for others, it was a back-breaking, heart-breaking job. If you picked the wrong place, you found nothing but dirt. You could work day in and day out, without finding a bit of gold.

For a long time the rest of the world knew nothing of the new gold fields. The Yukon valley was very hard to get to. It was separated from the rest of Canada by mountains, and huge ice fields, and hundreds of miles of bush. News travelled slowly to and from a place like that in 1898.

But at last the news got out. A few prospectors left the Klondike to spend their new-found riches Outside. That is what they called the rest of the world.

The newspapers got wind of it, and the news spread like wild fire. The papers

were full of wild, wonderful stories about Klondike gold.

News of the gold turned people almost crazy...Klondike fever, they called it. People would sell everything they had to get enough money to go to the Klondike.

It wasn't just gold to them. It was the chance to be rich, to enjoy life, to be somebody. It was a chance to turn their dreams into real life.

Millions of people all over the world wanted to go to the Klondike. About a hundred thousand of them set out for the Yukon.

Less than half of them ever made it to the gold fields. And of these thousands of people, how many struck it rich? A few dozen. Maybe even a few hundred. But no more.

Most of them went back home poorer than when they had started. And still they counted themselves lucky...lucky to be alive. Some of them were not so lucky.

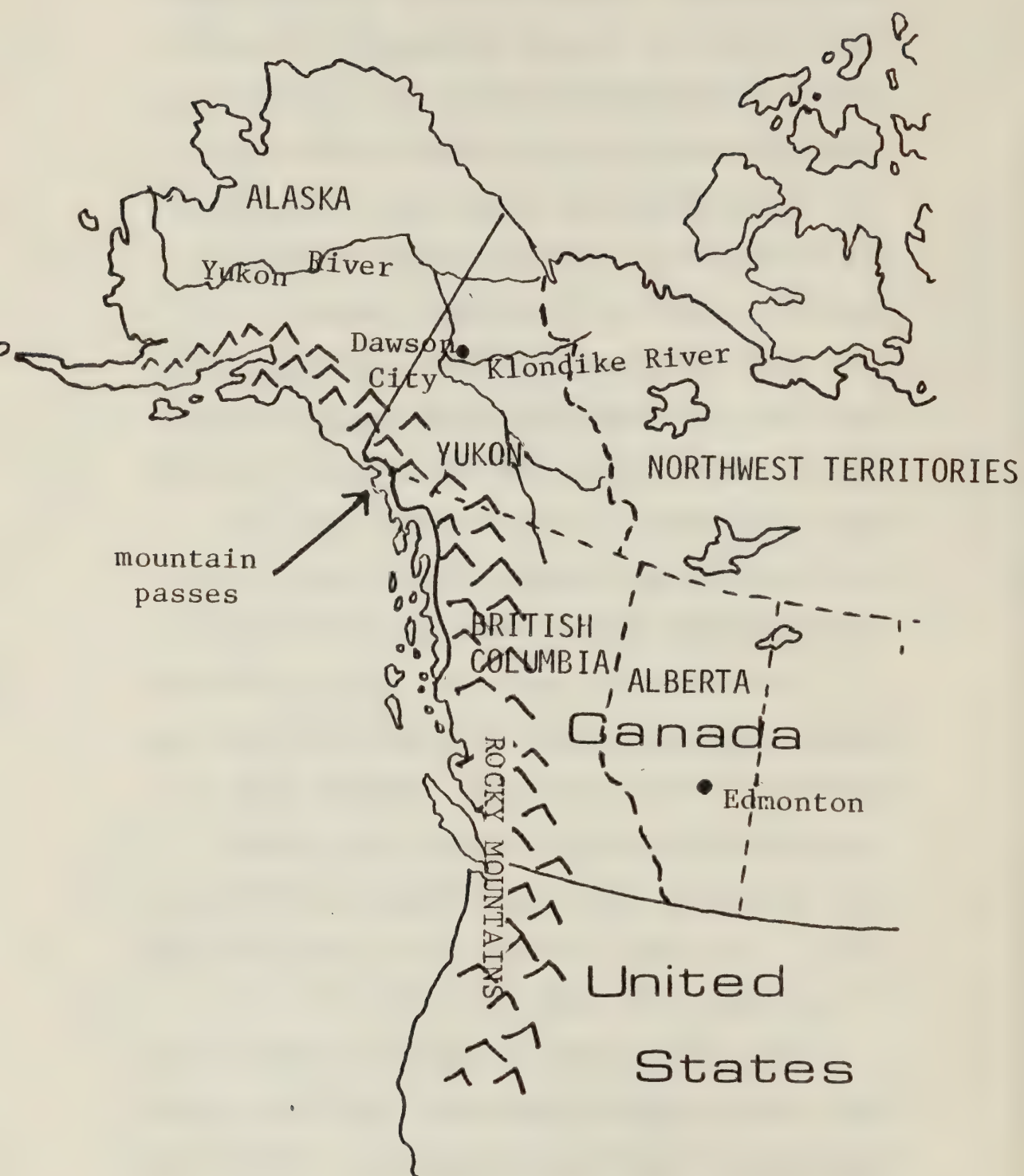
The problem was, they did not know how to live in a country like the Yukon.

The Chilkoot Indians and the prospectors knew their way around the north. They knew how to fight the bitter cold in winter, and the burning heat of the short summer. They knew enough to keep large supplies of food with them. Supply boats could get into the Yukon only in the summer.

But the new miners did not know this. They did not understand the north. They thought they could walk to Dawson in a few days, fill their pockets with gold, and walk out again. They did not understand the hardships they would have to face.

The first hardship was getting to the Yukon. It was hidden away behind towering mountains, huge white ice fields, and hundreds of miles of almost empty bush. Even going up the Yukon River by boat was hard. The boat trip was about two thousand miles long.

Some people turned back and went home when they found out how far they had to go. One old man was found wandering in the bush, asking everyone he happened to meet, "Where is the gold" Where do I find the gold?"



When someone told him it was a thousand miles away, the man pulled out a gun and shot himself. His dream had turned into a nightmare, and he could not face it.

The ones who stuck it out and made it to the Yukon had a bad time on the way there. Whether they went through the mountain passes, over the ice fields, through the bush, or up the river, they suffered.

Their pack animals suffered, too. One trail over the mountains was called "Dead Horse Trail", because almost three thousand horses died trying to get through it.

Many men died, too. They died of cold. They died of lack of food. They died of sickness. They died after bad accidents on the trail. They shot themselves when they knew they had lost everything.

It was as close to hell as anyone had ever been.

But what if they made it to the Klondike? What happened to them then?

A lucky few struck it rich. They

staked good claims, and found gold. Lots and lots of gold. Enough gold to keep a person rich forever.

But the others were not as lucky. Some had to leave Dawson City as soon as they got there. There was not enough food to keep them alive over the winter. Others stayed, and died from lack of food. Still others made it through the winter, but never found any gold.

Even with the cold and the heartbreak, Dawson City was an exciting place to be. Miners were not the only people who rushed to the gold fields.

There was another rush. This was the rush of people who knew they could make money in a gold rush town. There were gamblers, and dress makers, and saloon keepers, and dance hall girls, and salesmen selling everything from pet cats to the latest hats from Outside.

The Klondike was a lively place, all right. But the thousands of people who did not find gold could not enjoy it much. They could not pay the high prices in

Dawson City...fifteen dollars for a newspaper from Outside, eight hundred dollars for a box of nails, one dollar for an egg that was not even fresh.

They could not pay the saloon keepers, and the gamblers, and the dance hall girls, and all the rest of them. You needed gold to go into a saloon. You needed gold to spend the night gambling. You needed gold to buy a dance with a pretty dance hall girl.

Besides, they had come to the Klondike for one thing, and one thing only...to find gold. If they did not find gold, then they had failed.

And then it was all over, as quickly as it had begun. In 1899 a new gold field was found in Alaska, and a new gold rush began. The Klondike emptied as quickly as it had filled up. Only the dusty saloons and the empty cabins showed that there had been a gold rush there.

A few people stayed on. The town of Dawson is still there, much smaller and quieter than it was in 1898. There are

still prospectors and miners in the Yukon. But the gold rush was at an end by 1899.

And what about the millionaires? What happened to the ones who struck it rich? A few enjoyed their riches, but many ended their lives without a penny. It was a case of easy come, easy go.

And the others? The unlucky thousands who found only hardship and suffering in the Klondike? Well, they had their memories, and stories to tell their children and grandchildren for years to come.

They had something else besides. They had the feeling that comes with following a dream. The dream may have led them to hell and back, but they had done something that few people ever do. They had lived a dream, and made it real.

Level 4

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Word List

Alaska	fever
alive	flows
back-breaking	froze
behind	gamblers / gambling
bit	gold
built	hardships
bush	heart-breaking /
Canada / Canadian	heartbreak
case	heavy
chance	hell
Chilkoot	hidden
claim	huge
clothing	ice
crazy	kept
Dawson City	Klondike / Klondike River
deep	lack
dig	latest
dress-makers	led
dust / dusty	lively
empty / emptied	lucky / unlucky
face	lying
failed	measure

...Continued.

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Word List

memories	struck
millions / millionaire	suffered / suffering
miners	sunlight
nightmare	supply / supplies
northwestern	taken
nuggets	themselves
penny	unlucky / lucky
placer	wandered
piled	water
pockets	wood / wooden
poorer	wrong
prospectors	Yukon / Yukon River
quieter	
richer / richest /	
riches	
rush / rushed	
salesmen	
saloon	
sinks	
spread	
stake	
stories	

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